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**Developing Intercultural Communicative Competence
in the EFL Classroom:**

A Didactic Proposal Using the Picturebook

My Two Blankets



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Abstract:

In a world of increasing globalization and ethnic diversity, intercultural education plays a crucial role in promoting respect, open-mindedness and mutual understanding. With reference to Byram's five-faceted model of intercultural learning, this paper discusses the potential of picturebooks in developing intercultural communicative competence as well as visual and verbal literacy skills in the English as a foreign language classroom. The picturebook *My Two Blankets* (2014) by Irena Kobald and Freya Blackwood is used in a sequence of pedagogical activities to explore questions of cultural and linguistic identities, as well as the challenges to learn a new language in an unfamiliar environment.

Keywords: intercultural learning; intercultural communicative competence; picturebook; visual literacy; *My Two Blankets*

Resumen:

En un mundo de creciente globalización y diversidad étnica, la educación intercultural desempeña un papel crucial en la promoción del respeto, la apertura de mentalidad y la comprensión mutua. Con referencia al modelo de cinco facetas del aprendizaje intercultural de Byram, el presente trabajo examina el potencial de los libros ilustrados en el desarrollo de la competencia comunicativa intercultural, así como las habilidades de alfabetización visual y verbal en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera. El libro ilustrado *My Two Blankets* (2014) de Irena Kobald y Freya Blackwood se utiliza en una secuencia de actividades pedagógicas para explorar cuestiones de identidades culturales y lingüísticas, así como los desafíos para aprender un nuevo idioma en un entorno desconocido.

Palabras clave: educación intercultural; competencia comunicativa intercultural; libro ilustrado; alfabetización visual; *My Two Blankets*

INDEX

1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	3
2.1. Intercultural communicative competence.....	3
2.1.1 Hymes' concept of communicative competence.....	3
2.1.2 The concept of intercultural communicative competence.....	3
2.1.3 Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence.....	4
2.2. Picturebooks.....	6
2.2.1 Defining picturebooks: some scholars' views.....	6
2.2.2 Picturebooks in the English Foreign Language Classroom.....	7
2.2.3 Visual and Verbal Literacy.....	8
2.2.4 Picturebooks as a Medium to Develop Intercultural Competence.....	9
3. DEVELOPMENT.....	10
3.1. Contextualisation.....	10
3.2. Key competences and block of contents.....	11
3.3. Methodology and didactic principles.....	12
3.4. Attention to students with special educational needs.....	13
3.5. Didactic resources.....	14
3.6. Infrastructure.....	16
3.7. Assessment criteria.....	16
3.8. Work sessions.....	17
4. CONCLUSION.....	25
5. BIBLIOGRAPHY AND REFERENCES.....	27

FIGURES

Figure 1 Front cover of <i>My Two Blankets</i>	17
Figure 2 Back cover of <i>My Two Blankets</i>	18
Figure 3 Front endpapers.....	18
Figure 4 Back endpapers.....	18
Figure 5 Title and dedication pages.....	19
Figure 6 The old blanket.....	22
Figure 7 The new blanket.....	22
Figure 8 The blanket metaphor.....	23
Figure 9 A waterfall of strange sounds.....	25
Figure 10 A patchwork quilt.....	25

1. INTRODUCTION

Since the 1990s, foreign language teaching and learning has taken an intercultural turn. It is now widely acknowledged that language teaching should not only focus on linguistic and communicative competences, but also include intercultural knowledge and critical cultural awareness (Byram, 1997). In later publications, Byram (2008) goes a step further by suggesting that foreign language teaching has both educational and instrumental/functional purposes, contributing to the development of the learner's intercultural citizenship.

Over the past decades, the increased globalization and migration have had an important impact on our societies and education. As a consequence, there is a growing diversity in today's classrooms which are made up of students from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. In this multicultural context, intercultural education is more important than ever in order to embrace cultural diversity and promote a climate of respectful and peaceful coexistence. The UNESCO (2006) highlights as well the importance of intercultural education as a response to globalization and the challenge to provide quality education for all:

In a world experiencing rapid change, and where cultural, political, economic and social upheaval challenges traditional ways of life, education has a major role to play in promoting social cohesion and peaceful coexistence. Through programmes that encourage dialogue between students of different cultures, beliefs and religions, education can make an important and meaningful contribution to sustainable and tolerant societies (p.8).

The present paper aims to develop student's intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) secondary education classroom. Particular attention will be paid to student's understanding about language learning, cultural and linguistic identities as well as minority perspectives. Through Irena Kobald's and Freya Blackwood's compelling picturebook *My Two Blankets, Moving is hard-Friends make it easier* (2014), learners are introduced to the feeling of otherness and the experience of living between different cultures. The story of Cartwheel, a young

girl who had to flee her home to escape war, provides a mine of ideas for discussing such important topics as immigration, inclusion, diversity and friendship. To ensure a deeper understanding of the picturebook, we will not only focus on the text, but also on the pictural elements, thus developing student's English language skills and visual literacy skills.

Firstly, we present a theoretical framework which has been divided into three parts. The first one provides a description and definition of the concepts of 'communicative competence' and 'intercultural communicative competence'. We will present the most influential model of intercultural competence within the field of foreign language didactics which is Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). The next section presents some scholars' views on picturebooks and deals with the special interest of picturebooks in the EFL classroom as a medium for the development of verbal and visual literacy as well as intercultural competence.

The didactic proposal itself is made up of four sessions of 55 minutes each exploring topics related to diversity, multiple linguistic and cultural identities, and language learning. The activities, built around the picturebook *My Two Blankets*, generate opportunities for students to interact and improve their communication skills. Besides, students are led to negotiate and broaden their worldview, and thus to develop their intercultural competence. The paper rounds off with a general conclusion and some suggestions for further exploration of the selected picturebook.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Intercultural communicative competence

2.1.1 Hymes' concept of communicative competence

The term *communicative competence* was coined by the sociolinguist Dell Hymes (1972) in reaction to Chomsky's notion of *linguistic competence* and designates both knowledge and ability for language use in social interactions. According to Hymes, speakers not only need to know about grammatical structures but also about norms of usage and appropriacy in social contexts. In other words, a person who acquires communicative competence acquires linguistic and sociolinguistic knowledge, as well as the ability to use this knowledge appropriately in interaction (Whyte, 2019). The concept of 'communicative competence' is at the core of the communicative approach of foreign language teaching.

2.1.2 The concept of intercultural communicative competence

Since the 1990s, there has been a considerable amount of research on the place and the importance of culture in foreign language teaching and learning. According to Kramsch (1993), culture "is always in the background, right from day one, ready to unsettle the good language learners when they expect it least, making evident the limitations of their hard-won communicative competence, challenging their ability to make sense of the world around them" (p.1).

Chlopek (2008, 10) claims that, the lack of cultural competence and awareness can lead to humorous incidents, or - in the worst case - become the source of serious miscommunication and misunderstanding.

Over the last twenty years, English has achieved the status of *lingua franca*, having become the language of international communication (Crystal, 1997). Today, the aim for learning English is not only to communicate with native speakers of English but also with non-native speakers of English. By learning English, EFL students are becoming international, or rather intercultural communicators, as they are able to interact with people from all over the world (Chlopek, 2008). In order to function successfully in this culturally diverse environment, EFL learners have to develop intercultural communicative competence (Alptekin, 2002).

2.1.3. Byram's model of Intercultural Communicative Competence

Van Ek's study for the Council of Europe and dealing with the 'framework for comprehensive foreign language learning objectives' (1986) is at the origin of Byram's model of intercultural communicative competence (ICC). Van Ek argued that Foreign Language Teaching (FLT) does not only attend to the training in communication skills but contributes as well to the personal and social development of the learner as an individual.

Byram (1989) took up Van Ek's ideas about the contribution of FLT by suggesting that:

Foreign language teaching can be a major factor in what might be called – as an extension of the notions of primary and secondary socialisation – the process of tertiary socialisation, in which young people acquire an *intercultural communicative competence*: the ability to establish a community of meanings across cultural boundaries (...) this involves both cognitive and affective processes. These are, of course, not easily assessable as objectives but they are fundamental to the contribution of foreign language teaching to learner's education. (p.5)

In *Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence*, published in 1997, Byram's model of ICC was based on ideas presented in a paper (Byram and Zarate, 1994) that was written in connection with the Council of Europe's now well-known project of the 'Common European Framework of Reference for Language Learning and Teaching' in the 1990s.

In *Developing the Intercultural Dimension in Language Teaching* published by the Council of Europe in 2002, Byram discussed the concept '*intercultural speaker*':

The 'intercultural dimension' in language teaching aims to develop learners as *intercultural speakers* or *mediators* who are able to engage with complexity and multiple identities and to avoid the stereotyping which accompanies perceiving someone through a single identity. (...) Intercultural communication is communication on the basis of respect for individuals and equality of human rights as the democratic basis for social interaction (p. 9).

According to Byram's model, 'intercultural speakers' are "committed to turning intercultural encounters into relationships based on mutual respect and understanding" (Hoff, 2018). In later publications, Byram (2008) develops the concept of intercultural citizenship and suggests that language teaching should not limit itself to communication and the exchange of ideas, but can also lead to active engagement in both national and international civil society.

As foreign language teaching (FLT) has the experience of otherness at the centre of its concern, it contributes especially to the development of the qualities of the intercultural speaker. In the foreign language subject area, learners are required to engage with both familiar and unfamiliar experience through the medium of another language. FLT is primarily concerned with communication which means more than the mere exchange of information. The latter is indeed dependent upon understanding how what one says or writes will be perceived and interpreted in another cultural context. It depends on the ability to decentre and take up the perspective of the listener or reader (Byram, 1997).

Byram's five-faceted model is based on a view of language learning as a communicative, interactive and meaningful process. It describes the factors involved in successful intercultural communication as a set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and dispositions to act:

Savoirs: knowledge of how social groups and identities function and what is involved in intercultural interaction.

Savoir être: curiosity and openness; perspective-taking skills and ability to 'decentre': willingness to relativise one's own values, beliefs and behaviours.

Savoir comprendre: ability to interpret a document or event from another culture and relate it to documents or events from one's own.

Savoir apprendre/faire: skills of discovery and/or interaction.

Savoir s'engager: critical cultural awareness of one's own and other cultures

(adapted from Byram, 1997)

Byram's model has had a considerable impact on the educational policies and the development of school curriculum in a number of countries (Hoff, 2014). Intercultural education is considered as a means of managing linguistic and cultural diversity as it enables learners to develop open attitudes to otherness (Council of Europe, 2018).

2.2 Picturebooks

2.2.1 Defining picturebooks: some scholars' views

According to Lewis (2001), there are some disagreements about how one might best understand the way picturebooks work. This indecisiveness reflects itself even in the spelling of the word "picturebook": "Is it a compound word (joined to form one single word "picturebook"), a hyphenated word ("picture-book") or two distinct words ("picture book")?" (p.xiv)

Sipe (2008) suggests to use the compound word "picturebook" in order to "emphasize the inextricable connection of words and pictures and the unique qualities of the form" (p. 133). He uses the word "synergy" to describe the relationship between the words and pictures explaining that they work together on an equal footing "to produce a whole that is greater together than the sum of the individual parts" (p.132).

Nikolajeva & Scott (2006) claim that "the unique character of picturebooks as an art form is based on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal". (p. 1) In the words of Bader (1976), "the success of the picturebook as an art form hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the page". (p.1)

Golden (1990) discusses several types of interaction between text and pictures:

- (a) the texts and pictures are symmetrical (creating a redundancy)
- (b) the text depends on pictures for clarification
- (c) illustration enhances, elaborates text
- (d) the text carries primary narrative, illustration is selective
- (e) the illustration carries primary narrative, the text is selective

(in Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p.7)

However, Sipe (1998) argues that this classification of relationships has some limitations, in the sense that it could draw the attention away from the dynamic way in which, as Nodelman (1988) says “the words change the pictures and the pictures change the words”.

2.2.2 Picturebooks in the English Foreign Language classroom

Despite the fact that picturebooks are an invaluable didactic resource engaging learners of all ages in new and enriching reading experiences, picturebooks are often synonymous with Children’s Literature (Tan, 2002,) and their use with older EFL learners (over 12 years old) is still unconventional. However, over the last years several researchers have discussed the benefits of introducing picturebooks (and multimodal texts in general) in the EFL classroom. The works of Bland (2016), Bland & Lütge (2013), Mourão (2013), Morgado (2018) and Frey & Fisher (2008) corroborate that picturebooks are meaningful and motivational pedagogical tools.

According to Lee (2013), quite a few learners, especially in EFL classrooms, spend little time on reading. Research has shown that picturebooks can be a pathway to promote students’ reading motivation (Al Khaiyali, 2014), as they are mostly described as engaging, aesthetic (beautiful and artistically designed), easy-to-read, authentic, containing high frequency words and covering various types of topics (Lado, 2012). Mitchell (2002) summarizes the main characteristics of picturebooks as follows:

The name “picture books” evokes images of brightly coloured, beautifully illustrated books that beg to be read. No matter what our age, most of us still enjoy reading them because of their vibrant pictures, rich and evocative language, and poignant and meaningful themes. Picture books speak to us in the same way photographs do. They touch our emotions, delight our senses, appeal to our whimsy, and bring back memories of our childhood. Picture books invite us to curl up and read them. (p.71)

Additionally, Bland (2015) claims that multimodal texts such as picturebooks and graphic novels contribute to the narratives in multiple modes, namely the pictures, the words, the design and the peritext of picturebooks. However, picturebooks do not reiterate the same message in each mode. Bland (2015) points out that these messages “may

overlap, complement, amplify or contradict each other; they may tell different stories from differing perspectives or even from different time periods” (p.25). Due to the information gaps in the narrative, multimodal texts provide therefore rich opportunities for negotiation of understanding and meaning.

Moreover, the pictures may turn into dynamic mental images that become part of the reader’s repertoire of experience, anchoring ideas, concepts and feelings together with newly-acquired language (Bland, 2016, p. 46).

Ultimately, when reading picturebooks students are exposed to authentic texts. According to Mourão (2016), these very special books are “authentic” in all respects: the words (if they exist, as some picturebooks are wordless) are unabridged and have not been changed for language learning purposes and the illustrations have been freely designed by illustrators who didn’t pay heed to any language learning objectives (p.26).

2.2.3 Visual and Verbal Literacy

It is undeniable that we live in a visual era or - as Maria Avgerinou (2009) calls it - a *bain d’images* (image bath) era (p.28). As different forms of visual mass media such as television, the Internet and advertising are omnipresent in our daily lives, visual literacy should be the primary literacy of the twenty-first century (Burmark, 2008).

George Lucas (2004), American film director, discusses why teaching visual literacy is so important in education:

Today we work with the written or spoken word as the primary form of communication. But we also need to understand the importance of graphics, music, and cinema, which are just as powerful and in some ways more deeply intertwined with young people’s culture. We live and work in a visually sophisticated world, so we must be sophisticated in using all the forms of communication, not just the written word.

(Edutopia, para.6)

John Debes (1969) was the first scholar to coin the term “visual literacy” and defined it as a set of vision-competencies enabling a person “to discriminate and interpret

the visual actions, objects, and/or symbols, natural or man-made, that are encountered in the environment” (p.28).

Thereafter, other scholars have formed their version of the concept. For Ausburn & Ausburn (1978) visual literacy can be defined as “a group of skills which enable an individual to understand and use visuals for intentionally communicating with others” (p.291). Hortin (1983) develops the aforementioned definition by adding the idea of visual thinking: “Visual literacy is the ability to understand (read) and use (write) images and to think and learn in terms of images, ie., to think visually” (p.99). Picturebooks, along with other visual materials such as comic books, graphic novels, films, to name but a few, are a perfect medium for increasing students’ visual awareness, as well as their ability to read and understand the text.

According to O’Neil (2011), the pictorial elements – colour, line, shape, size and composition – are some of the tools that illustrators use to create effects (p.215). When interacting with the printed word, these design elements help to establish and enhance the story. However, the overall comprehension of picture books is dependent on the reader’s ability to “read” pictures as well as the text (p.214), hence the importance to scaffold learners’ development of visual literacy by providing them with the metalanguage for discussing and analysing the textual, visual and design elements of the picturebook (Ritone & Kurkjian, 2018).

2.2.4 Picturebooks as a medium to develop intercultural competence

Another interesting benefit of using picturebooks in the English Foreign Language (EFL) classroom is that they are an invaluable resource for the development of learner’s intercultural communicative competence. According to Mourão (2013), “picturebooks that show more through the pictures than the words leave gaps for personal interpretations” (p.82). The author claims that these types of picturebooks raise more questions than answers, thus engaging students in a critical and questioning approach to learning (Mourão, 2013).

Likewise, Leland, Lewison & Harste (2012) suggest that it is often through the illustrations in picturebooks that students access other interpretations of what they take for granted. By using more challenging picturebooks teachers can provide English

language students with opportunities to question social constructs and to be critical readers.

Lütge (2013) argues that children's literature in general, and picturebooks in particular, offer "a fascinating platform for exploring questions of identity, values and worldviews, the basic ingredients for intercultural learning" (p.104). She points out that "raising an awareness of different levels of otherness is one of the big potentials of children's and young adult's literature in second language education" (p.103) as students are exposed to other cultural perspectives. As noted by Ahmed & Narcy-Combes (2011), picturebooks that authentically represent cultural diversity can promote flexibility of perspective even in younger readers. The input of many EFL school text books, though, is often monolithic, "culture-free" (Clarke & Clarke, 1990, p.39) and rather stereotyped.

Finally, reading a literary text in a foreign language is in itself an intercultural experience, as it encourages the reader to see the world from a different perspective (Bredella & Delanoy, 1996; Heggernes, 2019).

3. Development

3.1 Contextualisation

The didactic proposal is organized into four sessions of 55 minutes each and has been designed for students of 1st ESO (twelve to thirteen years of age). The verbal text of the picturebook, which is made up of simple, short sentences, rich in similes and metaphors, corresponds to the language level of the 1st ESO. Additionally, the pictures support learners who are struggling with reading comprehension.

Since the main character of the story is a seven or eight-year-old girl, we think that the picturebook is best suited for lower grades of the ESO. Students who are still in the primary to secondary transition period may relate to the protagonist, as both are facing the challenge of learning a foreign language and having to adapt to a new environment. Moreover, students with culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds may find themselves reflected in the words and illustrations of the picturebook.

3.2 Key competences and block of contents

For the design and development of the didactic proposal the Spanish Laws of Education have been taken into account. These are, first of all, the *Organic Law of Education 2/2006 (LOE), of 3rd May*, supplemented by the *Organic Law of Education 8/2013, of 9th December* which establish the government's general dispositions to define the objectives, key competences, contents and evaluation criteria of the educational system. Moreover, the *Decree 87/2015, of 5th June*, of the Consell, establishes the syllabus and overall organisation of secondary compulsory education and baccalaureate of the Valencian Community.

More specifically, and in accordance with the terms laid out in the *Royal Decree 1105/2014, of 26th December*, students should not only develop communicative competence but also acquire 'transversal elements' including values that sustain, among others, freedom, justice, equality, political pluralism, peace, democracy, respect for human rights, as well as the prevention of terrorism and any type of violence, racism and xenophobia.

Moreover, the *Order ECD/65/2015, of 21st January* sets out the key competences necessary to ensure a high-quality education: linguistic communicative competence, learning to learn, digital competence, social and civic competences, cultural awareness and expression, sense of initiative and entrepreneurship as well as mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology. All the seven key competences are taken into account in this didactic proposal. However, special emphasis is put on three of them: the linguistic communicative competence, which is central to our subject, the social and civic skills as well as the cultural awareness and expression.

➤ Linguistic communicative competence:

This competence is central to our subject, since learning a foreign language develops students' communication skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing). By exploring the multiple layers of multimodal texts such as picturebooks, learners become aware of other modes of communication (visual, spatial, gestural) complementing and enhancing the linguistic communication. The communicative activities involve the four main skills with read-alouds, silent reading, listening, speaking and writing. Communication is promoted through looking and discussing the pictures. Class debates require students to interact and

negotiate meaning with other students. Ultimately, the picturebook highlights aspects of plurilingualism and language learning.

➤ Social and civic skills

The activities allow students to discuss topics such as diversity, inclusion, empathy and friendship. *My Two Blankets* captures the reality many immigrants live, offering students the opportunity to reflect on concepts such as othering and belonging. All these activities are relevant for the acquisition of interpersonal and intercultural competence as well as global citizenship.

➤ Cultural awareness and expression

My Two Blankets, a picturebook narrating cultural diversity and illustrating minority perspectives, provides the opportunity not only to learn about other cultures, but also to promote better understanding of and respect for other cultural groups. The first-person narrative helps learners develop intercultural competence, “i.e. the ability to put yourself into others’ shoes, see the world the way they see it, and give it the meaning they give it based on shared human experience” (Kramsch, 2016, p.42). The story allows students to see the world through the eyes of a recently arrived refugee child and gives them an insight into the challenges of migration. Additionally, the activities enable students to express their opinions and give an emotional response to issues of cultural and linguistic identities, inclusion and diversity.

For English as a first foreign language subject, the contents and its corresponding evaluation criteria are organised into 5 blocks. In this didactic proposal, the main focus lies on the production of oral texts (block 2), comprehension of written texts (block 3) and production of written texts (block 4) as learners are encouraged to interact with other students, express themselves orally and in writing, read the story and participate in the final class project. The remaining two blocks (comprehension of oral texts and transversal elements of the subject) are also taken into account - albeit to a minor degree.

3.3 Methodology and didactic principles

The didactic proposal is based on the communicative approach, whose main goal is to promote learners’ communicative competence: the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately. Communicative language teaching (CLT) focuses on the

development of the learners' communication skills, emphasizing interaction in a meaningful context. Unlike traditional approaches, CLT is a learner-centered approach which implies that the learner "should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way" (Breen & Candlin, 1980, p.110). Students are exposed to the picturebook's real, authentic language and are encouraged to negotiate meaning and share information in meaningful activities.

Secondly, the Task-based Language Teaching approach, "a logical development of the CLT" (Richards, 2001, p. 223), has also been applied in this didactic proposal. Students are required to carry out purposeful tasks that emphasize communication and meaning. Ultimately, the didactic unit is also based on the Cooperative Language Learning approach. The activities which require students to work in pairs or small groups encourage teamwork and cooperation.

Regarding the didactic principles of intercultural education, special emphasis lies on the teacher's positive attitude towards diversity. In order to provide an ideal learning and teaching environment, teachers should acknowledge and build on the rich cultural and linguistic resources, the so-called "virtual school bag" (Thomson, 2002, p.7) that students bring to school. Rather than being an inherent hindrance to student performance, diversity is a source of potential growth (OECD, 2010, p.13).

3.4. Attention to students with special educational needs

The successful integration of students with special educational needs (SEN) into the regular classroom requires from the teacher a careful planning of human and material resources. The key principles of equality and inclusion that apply to the Valencian education system are laid out in the Decree 104/2018.

For the effective inclusion of students with hearing, visual or motor impairment, the teacher and the school should first of all take steps to remove any physical barriers students may encounter when accessing the school facilities and classroom. Projecting the picturebook on the whiteboard and enlarging the text and pictures to help students with visual impairment or facing the hearing-impaired student and speaking clearly and slowly are other possible adaptation strategies.

For students with learning disorders (dyslexia,...) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), picturebooks are excellent scaffolding resources, as the images give extra support to learners who are struggling with the verbal text. Additionally, the text of *My Two Blankets* is mainly made up of short, simple sentences which facilitates reading and comprehension. The repetitive sentence structure and the use of repeated, consecutive words (e.g. "strange") are also useful hints to decode the words of the text. The teacher can help by explicitly drawing attention to these text features.

For students with intellectual disability, the visual support of the images is also very helpful. Moreover, the teacher can create easier activities by breaking down complicated tasks into simpler, manageable steps and allowing more time for completion. Finally, working in pairs or small groups is beneficial for all learners but, above all, for SEN students, as it reduces learners' speaking anxiety and increases their self-esteem and self-confidence.

3.5. Didactic resources

For the present didactic proposal we used the picturebook *My Two Blankets*, subtitled *Moving is hard - friends make it easier* (2014). Written by Irena Kobald and beautifully illustrated by Freya Blackwood, the compelling 32-page picturebook authentically reflects cultural and linguistic diversity. Irena Kobald, herself a multilingual Austrian immigrant to Australia, found the inspiration for her first picturebook when her own daughter became friends with a Sudanese child.

The first-person narrative tells the story of Cartwheel, a young immigrant girl who is forced to leave her home country and moves to a Western-like city with a new language. Everything is "strange" to her: the people, the words they speak, even the wind feels strange to her. She finds comfort by wrapping herself in her old blanket that she brought from the old world.

In this "blanket of my own words and sounds" (Kobald & Blackwood, 2014, unpaginated) she feels safe and secure to the point of isolating herself and losing interest in the world around her. She vividly describes how she feels being surrounded by a foreign language: "it was like standing under a waterfall of strange sounds. The waterfall was cold. It made me feel alone" (Kobald & Blackwood, 2014, unpaginated). Cartwheel faces an identity crisis to the point of feeling annihilated: "I felt like I wasn't me anymore"

(Kobald & Blackwood, 2014, unpaginated). One day, she meets a little girl in the park who teaches her new words. A friendship gradually grows and Cartwheel starts weaving a new blanket. By creating this new “language blanket” (Daly, 2021, p.25), which is different in colours and shapes, she opens herself to the new world and starts to communicate.

Morgado’s (2018) study about minority cultures in school, shows that *My Two Blankets* highlights living between cultures as a common contemporary experience. The picturebook presents “linguistic barriers, (...), acceptance of a new cultural identity, and integration” (p.33). Moreover, it shows how “language is at the basis of all intercultural encounters, as well as the process of learning a new language-culture through the appropriation of lexical items” (p. 33). The experience of having to learn a new language can be compared to the students’ own experiences as EFL learners or speakers of several languages (Morgado, 2018).

In a recent paper exploring the role of picturebooks in developing empathy in relation to language learning, Daly (2021) selects *My Two Blankets* (amongst others) and closely examines the written text and illustrations. She describes the colour symbolism combined with the creative use of metaphors and images to express how it feels like to learn a new language:

The use of cold blues, greens and greys for the world in which Cartwheel and her mother find themselves, and the imagery in the text of the cold waterfall, represent the challenges and loneliness of having to learn a new language in ways which evoke authentic emotions. The visual and textual metaphor of a blanket for a language is also used extensively (...). (p.25)

Additionally, the protagonist’s facial expression and body language are also of great interest as they show “Cartwheel’s sadness and loneliness, and then her increasing confidence and happiness, culminating in the full body expression of happiness, a cartwheel” (Daly, p.26).

Moreover, Daly (2021) claims that *My Two Blankets* is an interlingual picturebook: the text is written in English but the representation of the foreign words as small paper planes makes it interlingual. These paper planes in the shape of a bird, leaf and umbrella are schematic at first, but are becoming more and more detailed, reflecting Cartwheel’s growing language skills.

All the aforementioned features make *My Two Blankets* an interesting resource for promoting cultural and linguistic awareness as well as intercultural competence.

3.6. Infrastructure

For the correct implementation of the didactic proposal it is essential to create a welcoming, learning-friendly classroom environment. Apart from being spacious, light and airy, the classroom should be equipped with a computer, projector, speakers, whiteboard or digital board, blackboard and a stable Internet connection. The room should be as soundproof as possible to improve the classroom acoustics and to avoid students getting distracted by external noise.

As the didactic proposal involves working and collaborating in pairs and small groups, it should be possible to move the classroom furniture around so as to change the seating arrangement. The grouping of four classroom desks (in so-called group pods) with students facing each other is for instance a good option for small group works. The class should ideally have access to the school's computer room, so that students can accomplish the tasks requiring the use of a computer.

3.7. Assessment criteria

The students' progress will be assessed through direct observation and questioning during lesson time as well as assessment rubrics for the writing and speaking activities. Moreover, we will keep a teacher's diary to record what happens in the course of the activities and our thoughts about it. Teacher's diaries are useful development tools that not only help reflect on the teaching and learning process but also provide inspiring ideas for future activities.

The overall grade is made up of five components, where each component has a given weighting. The collaborative Padlet writing activity of session 1 that involves a prediction of the story's plot represents 15% of the final grade, whereas the Jamboard group activity dealing with visual techniques is worth 25% (15% for the writing part and 10% for the individual oral presentation). The individual activity involving the design of their own blanket counts as 25% of the final grade (15% for the creative work itself and 10% for the oral presentation). The final Padlet writing activity (pair work) about

figurative language and its visual representation has a weighting of 15%. Ultimately, participation and behaviour in class accounts for 20% of the final grade.

3.8. Work sessions

Session 1	
Time	55 minutes
Skills	Speaking, writing
Contents	The peritext of the picturebook (front and back covers, the endpapers, title page and dedication page)
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To introduce the picturebook, a multimodal narrative -To introduce and elicit key vocabulary as well as metalanguage for later use -To develop visual literacy skills -To generate students' interest for the story -To make an initial prediction about a story's plot based upon the book's peritext
Interaction	The whole class and small groups of 3 to 4 students

Activity 1 (small group work): What do you think this story is about? (8 minutes)

During session 1, the students don't actually see the physical book, as all the images are projected on the whiteboard. Students work in small groups of 3 to 4 students.

The warm-up activity consists of showing the front cover of the picturebook and asking the group members to discuss the following questions:

- What do you see?
- What does the title tell you?
- Which extra information does the subtitle give you?
- Which colours are used and what might the colours mean?
- What is a blanket? What do we need it for? How do you feel in relation to a blanket?
- What is the book about?

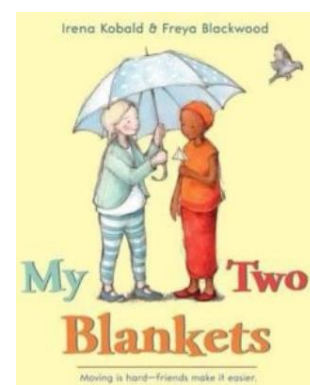


Figure 1: Front cover of *My Two Blankets*

Activity 2 (small group work): Let's find out more about the book! (8 minutes)

Next, we show the back cover and ask the same group members to discuss the following questions:

- What do you think the picture represents?
- Which animals/objects can you see? How are they arranged in the picture? (lines, composition, shape)
- Which colours are used and what do they symbolize?
- With the extra information of the back cover:
What do you think now the story is about?



Figure 2: Back cover of *My Two Blankets*

Students are asked to relate the information conveyed by the front and back covers. We draw their attention to the visual elements – colour, line, shape, size and composition – that the illustrator uses to create special effects. To do this, we provide the necessary visual metalanguage to enable students to “read” and describe the pictures. As they work, we monitor the groups and clarify any doubts that may arise.

Activity 3 (small group work): Look inside the book! (4 minutes)

Then, we display the front and back endpapers, as well as the title and dedication pages. The questions to discuss are:

- What is special about the front and back endpapers? What colour are they?

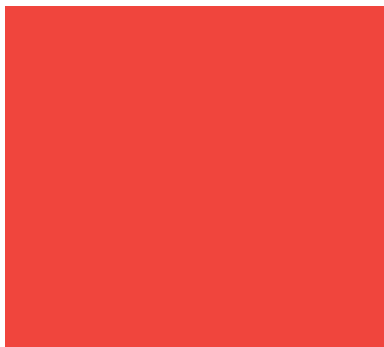


Figure 3: Front endpapers

Figure 4: Back endpapers

- What do you notice about the title?
- What is the young girl doing? What about you?
- Who wrote the first/ second dedication?
- To whom is the book dedicated?
- What does the dedication mean?

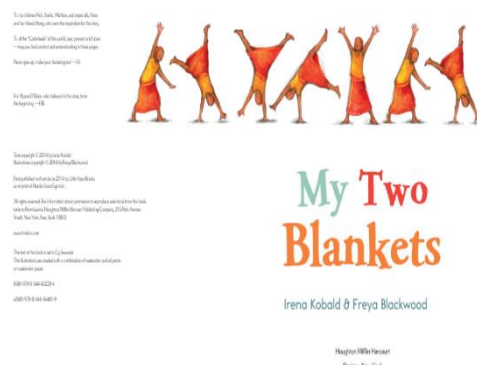


Figure 5: Title and dedication pages

We enlarge the dedication by the author which reads as follows:

To my children Nick, Sasha, Matthias, and especially Anna and her friend Atong, who were the inspiration for this story.

To all the “Cartwheels” of this world, past, present and future – may you find comfort and understanding in these pages.

Never give up; make your blanket grow! – I.K.

Activity 3 highlights once more the importance of the colour symbolism: the warm red endpapers at the front of the book represent the past or the old world, whereas the cold green colour of the back endpapers stands for the present or new world. Through the author’s dedication message, students become better acquainted with Cartwheel, the narrator of the story.

Activity 4 (small group work): Ready, steady, write! (15 minutes)

We ask the group members to express the previously brainstormed ideas in writing. Every group will share their piece of writing with the rest of the class by posting it on Padlet. The following questions will help organizing the ideas:

- What type of book is it?
- Who are the main characters?
- Where do they live?
- How did they meet?

- What happened next?
- How did the story end?

Before they start working, we make sure the students understand all the questions.

Activity 5 (whole class): Share your ideas with your classmates (20 minutes)

Students see the collaborative work of the other groups displayed on Padlet. Every group elects a spokesperson who will then read aloud the group's contribution to the rest of the class. At the end of the presentations, students choose their favourite story by voting in Padlet.

Session 2	
Time	55 minutes
Skills	Listening, speaking, reading, writing
Contents	The peritext of the picturebook The plot of the story
Objectives	-To develop listening and reading skills -To expand vocabulary of everyday objects -To promote visual literacy skills -To develop empathy toward minority group members -To improve perspective taking skills
Interaction	The whole class and small groups of 3 to 4 students

Activity 1(whole class): Discovering the story (15 minutes)

The students listen to the picturebook being read out loud to them by the teacher. To do this, we view the ebook version of the picturebook on the whiteboard. While reading the text, we flip slowly through the pages to allow students to see the visual elements of the picturebook artwork. The prior knowledge they gained in session 1 facilitates reading and listening comprehension. However, in case of doubts, students can ask questions during the read aloud.

There are several videos available on YouTube in which a narrator tells the story. The ebook has though the clear advantage that we can adjust our reading speed to support students' comprehension of the text.

Activity 2 (whole class): Let's compare! (5 minutes)

We show again the Padlet wall of session 1, giving students the opportunity to revisit their previous predictions. They can now compare their own version of the story with the actual one and analyse the differences and similarities. This activity also gives them the possibility to make a connection between the peritext and the actual story. They will probably have now a better understanding of the meaning-making potential of the picturebook's peritextual features.

Activity 3 (small group work): Connecting to own experiences (10 minutes)

The class is again split into small groups of 3 to 4 members. In this activity, students share their opinions and feelings about the story, possibly connecting it to their own experiences.

We open the group discussion on their personal experiences with the following questions:

- Have you ever been in a similar situation as shown in the story?
- Have you ever felt left out, sad or lonely?
- How would you feel if you moved to a new place?
- Have you ever made somebody feel welcome?

Activity 4 (small group work): My two blankets (25 minutes)

After the discussion, each group is given two copies of the picturebooks and asked to re-read the story and look attentively at the pictures. In this activity, students compare the old blanket Cartwheel wraps herself in with the newly-created blanket:

- Do the blankets have the same colour?
- Do they have the same shapes and lines?
- Do they represent similar animals/objects?
- What do you make of Cartwheel's red shoes in the new blanket?
- Name the animals/objects in your first language (L1) and English.

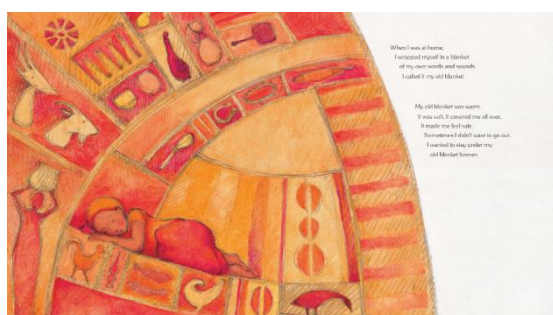


Figure 6: The old blanket



Figure 7: The new blanket

We monitor the progress of the groups as they are working through the activity. As in session 1, we draw their attention to the protagonist's body language, its position in the picture and the pictorial elements (warm/cold colours, line, shape, size and composition) that the illustrator uses to create moods and emotions. Students are given the necessary meta-language which helps them to understand and talk about visual meaning.

They then write down their text in Jamboard. This digital whiteboard provides plenty of space to display ideas and is ideal for collaborative work.

At the beginning of session 3, the groups share their work and get feedback from the class.

Session 3	
Time	55 minutes
Skills	Speaking, writing, reading
Contents	The figurative language of the picturebook The student's own blanket
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To develop speaking, writing and reading skills -To expand vocabulary as well as visual metalanguage -To foster visual literacy skills -To develop awareness of figurative language -To develop empathy toward minority group members -To promote creative expression
Interaction	The whole class and small groups of 3 to 4 students

Activity 1 (whole class): The two blankets (15 minutes)

The pictures of the two blankets are projected onto the whiteboard and students label the different animals and objects in both English and the students' first language (Spanish, Valencian, Arabic, Romani, Russian,...).

The groups share their ideas about the visual elements they have identified in the pictures and get feedback from the class. Every group member presents orally one aspect of visual language.

Activity 2 (whole class): The imagery of the blanket (15 minutes)

We introduce students to the concepts of simile and metaphor, literary devices that draw parallels or comparisons between two unlike things or ideas. The writer creatively uses these figures of speech to activate the reader's imagination and convey special emotions and impressions. We give examples of commonly used metaphors and similes such as: Life is like a roller coaster/ The typical teenager's room is a disaster area.

Next, students re-read the text of the fourth double spread page (2 facing pages) where Cartwheel says: "When I was at home, I wrapped myself in a blanket of my own words and sounds. I called it my old blanket." Then, we start the class discussion with some questions:

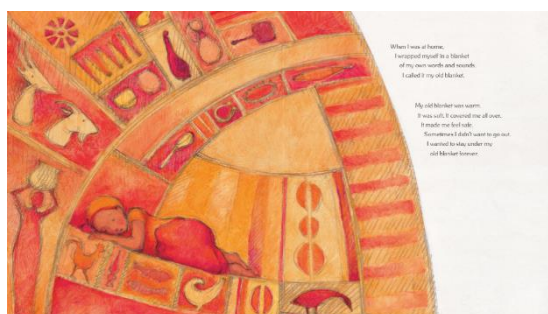


Figure 8: The blanket metaphor

- What is the blanket? What does it represent?
- Is it just a blanket? Or is there something more?

During the open class discussion, students are guided to think of the old blanket as a metaphor for holding on to one's own experiences, culture and language when moving to a foreign country. It provides Cartwheel a sense of belonging and connectedness to her family and community. The new blanket, which is at first thin and small, represents the new country with its culture and language.

Activity 3 (small group work): My very own blanket (25 minutes)

The class is again split into small groups of 3 to 4 members. This activity is, at first, individual but involves a sharing of the results at the end.

We make sheets of coloured cardboard paper available to the students and ask them to draw, individually, a blanket of their first language. In order to do this activity, learners pick out the best colour for their blanket and think of shapes, lines and objects to decorate it with. They are encouraged to use creative ways to decorate their blanket and every technique (drawing, painting, collage,...) is welcome. Finally, the cardboard squares of the 4 or 3 group members are joined and stuck together to form a patch of the final class quilt. As this activity may need more time to be completed, learners can finish their “blanket” at home or in the art class (cross-curricular activity).

Session 4	
Time	55 minutes
Skills	Speaking, writing, reading
Contents	The figurative language of the picturebook The class blanket
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -To develop speaking, writing and reading skills -To foster visual literacy skills -To develop awareness of figurative language -To develop empathy toward minority group members -To reflect on language learning -To promote creative expression
Interaction	The whole class, small groups of 3 to 4 students and pairs

Activity 1 (pair work): Learning a new language (20 minutes)

In pairs, students re-read the text of the third double spread page where Cartwheel says: “Nobody spoke like I did. When I went out, it was like standing under a waterfall of strange sounds. The water was cold. It made me feel alone.” In this passage, the author uses a simile which creates a vivid image of how it feels learning a new language.

First, we ask students if they ever had been close to a waterfall and how they felt. We show them a short video clip of a waterfall to introduce the discussion (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UwSzu_0h7Bg).

Next, learners are encouraged to draw a connection between themselves and the main character:

- How many languages do you speak?
- How did you feel when you started to learn English?
- Do you consider learning a new language hard/easy/challenging?



Figure 9: The waterfall of strange sounds

Finally, the pairs discuss how the author and illustrator have represented a foreign language like a waterfall. They share their ideas on Padlet.

Activity 2 (small group work and whole class): Our class patchwork quilt (35 minutes)

To start with, we show the students an image of a patchwork quilt and explain that the beauty of the quilt is in the different textures and colours of the patches.



Figure 10: A patchwork quilt

Next, the patches of the different groups are joined together to make a poster representing a colourful class patchwork quilt. The poster entitled *Our class blanket* is then displayed in the classroom. Finally, each group member presents and describes his/her blanket to the rest of the class.

4. CONCLUSION

In a world of increasing globalization and ethnic diversity, education plays a central role in promoting respect, open-mindedness and mutual understanding. In the current context of globalization, the intercultural teaching approach in the EFL classroom

helps young people experience the diversity and the commonality of human experience and explore questions of cultural identities, values and worldviews. Picturebooks narrating diversity and illustrating minority perspectives lend itself particularly well for the development of learners' intercultural communicative competence.

The didactic proposal is based on the picturebook *My Two Blankets*, “a story about new ways of speaking, new ways of living, new ways of being”, according to the blurb on the back of the book. The picturebook is of particular interest since it encourages students to reflect on the challenges of learning a new language, both as a migrant and as a learner of a foreign language. It sensitively explores issues of identity and belonging, which, in our increasingly diverse society, is beneficial for both minority and majority members. With reference to Byram's five-faceted model of intercultural competence, the pedagogic activities have been designed to develop the ability to ‘decentre’ and to foster empathy towards minority group members, while simultaneously increasing the learners' awareness of the verbal-visual interplay of the picturebook.

Concerning the suggestions for further exploration of the selected picturebook, we would like to highlight that *My Two Blankets* is also available in bilingual editions, as it has been translated into three languages: Arabic, Farsi and Dari. Bilingual picturebooks are valuable pedagogical resources which ‘address the diverse ethnic and linguistic composition of classrooms, as they target home language literacy and literacy development in English” (Naqvi, Thorne, Pfitscher, Nordstokk, & McKeoughat, 2013, as cited in Ibrahim, 2020). This multilingual approach to developing intercultural competence is particularly beneficial for minority and newly arrived migrant students. By bringing students' first language and culture into the classroom, they perceive that their L1 is valued and makes them feel welcome at school.

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